United Nations A/52/PV.21

General Assembly
Fifty-second Session

Official Records

21st plenary meeting
Thursday, 2 October 1997, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Udovenko . . . . . (Ukraine)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 9 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: The first speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Qatar, His Excellency Sheikh Hamad bin Jassem bin Jabr Al-Thani.

Sheikh Al-Thani (Qatar) (*interpretation from Arabic*): It gives me great pleasure to congratulate you, Sir, on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. I am confident that your political experience will help you conduct the work of the session wisely and successfully.

I should also like to commend your predecessor, His Excellency Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia, for the excellent way in which he presided over the General Assembly at its fifty-first session.

I also wish to extend our congratulations to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on his election to his current position, and to express our appreciation for his programme for the reform of the Organization. He can be assured of our full support for any measures he takes to that end.

As we approach a new millennium, the world is witnessing a series of internal and external conflicts that represent a great regression when compared to the optimistic expectations that followed the end of the cold war and the collapse of ideological conflicts. A new world characterized by balance and equitable relations among States was expected to emerge, with a view to the creation of innovative cooperation among our States and peoples in different areas of concern. However, I regret to say that the world is still facing severe problems, such as political conflict, poverty, famine and intensive migratory movements. These are the result of poor economic conditions, refugee flows caused by wars, the deterioration of the environment, trafficking in illicit drugs and the proliferation of organized crime.

In the context of these changes, and more than half a century after the United Nations was established, there is an urgent need for the Organization to undergo drastic reforms, both structural and functional, so as to establish rules and principles for a new international order free of double standards. Such a new order would allow us to rise to the new challenges and achieve the goals set forth in the Charter more than 50 years ago for the maintenance of international peace and security and the intensification of international cooperation for the benefit of the peoples of the world.

To this end, the process of reform must begin by activating the role of the General Assembly and enabling it to fulfil its duty in an effective manner that would give its democratic resolutions vitality and credibility before international public opinion. The Security Council must also be reformed, so that it can carry out the role it has been entrusted with, because it has a special status among

97-86128 (E)

This record contains the original text of speeches delivered in English and interpretations of speeches delivered in the other languages. Corrections should be submitted to original speeches only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and be sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned, *within one month of the date of the meeting*, to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, Room C-178. Corrections will be issued after the end of the session in a consolidated corrigendum.

the United Nations bodies, as defined in the Charter. In our view, this cannot be achieved except through a general agreement that would regulate the use of the veto power, limiting such use to cases covered by Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, namely, threats to international peace.

In order for the Security Council to reflect the new political and economic realities of a changing world, it must increase the number of its non-permanent members to provide for just and balanced representation and to enable the Council to deal with the new international realities and shoulder its responsibilities by becoming more democratic through the adoption of a rotation system, not limiting membership to certain States, and by giving all States the opportunity to participate in its work and assume their share of international responsibility.

Although we understand the opinions advocating an increase in the number of permanent members, we believe that the coexistence of permanent members that have the power of veto with permanent members that do not, plus non-permanent members, runs counter to the concepts of equality among States, geographic and cultural representation and international participation. It also runs counter to the principle of democratic decision-making. In order to achieve the required balance, fairness, justice, equality and reason call for an increase in Security Council membership for Asia, Africa and Latin America. Together, those three continents have the majority of world population and States. Nevertheless, their representation on the Security Council is less than 50 per cent. In order for the Secretary-General to be able to carry out the reforms that fall within his competence, the financial crisis of the United Nations must be addressed by making Member States honour their legal commitments and pay their dues without delay. In this regard, we would like to express our deep gratitude to Mr. Ted Turner for his generous donation to some United Nations humanitarian programmes. We hope this will be an encouraging initiative for others to follow.

The task of maintaining international peace and security has particular importance. Therefore, measures recommended by the General Assembly or taken by the Security Council should not be limited to post-conflict or war situations. More attention should be given to appropriate and timely preventive measures, because we believe that early measures adopted by the international community are the ideal way to avert the outbreak of conflicts and wars and to avoid taking the necessary political and military measures in the aftermath of the conflict — let alone imposing half solutions that are often unfair.

The question of disarmament plays an essential role in building the foundation of international peace and security. To achieve this goal, we believe that renewing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) indefinitely is a decision that requires more support and endorsement, so that the Treaty can acquire a universal character, with the adherence of all States. In this context, the State of Qatar affirms that Israel should adhere to that Treaty and should place its nuclear facilities under the International Atomic Energy Agency's safeguards regime. This will be a basic step towards establishing a zone free from nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. It would also contribute to achieving equitable and balanced peace and stability in that important area of the world so that there would be no multiple criteria for defining the conduct of States.

In the same context, we cannot fail to mention the special importance of the Convention to ban anti-personnel mines, which was finalized in Oslo recently. It will be ready for signature in Ottawa next December. We hope it will be signed by all States.

The world has witnessed fundamental economic changes, such as the end of State control of economic life in many States, the withering away of numerous restraints on international trade, the easy transfer of capital and huge investments across the world. Meanwhile, many economies in developing countries are still deteriorating. This requires that urgent and effective solutions be provided by the international community to enable those States to progress and develop their societies through building strong and effective economies. Such an endeavour requires us to take a new look at expenditures on armaments, in order to save such huge sums and allocate them to supporting education and health programmes. This would also enable us to address the problems of poverty and the environment and to develop the economies of developing nations. This is an absolute necessity for any new international economic order based on integration and balance, and is capable of devising desired solutions for the aforementioned problems. The problems of poverty, backwardness and lack of access to education and medical care are among the problems that affect developing countries. The societies of such States also suffer from a population explosion that is disproportionate to their resources. At the same time, fortunes are being wasted on armaments, arms races or

luxuries. This causes huge discrepancies in consumption rates between the peoples of rich countries and those of poor countries.

Such problems compel us to be fully aware of the fact that solving them requires reconsidering the question of military expenditures. It is no secret to anybody in authority that while the programmes implemented by the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Food Programme cost less than $4.6 billion a year, Governments all over the world are spending about $800 billion every year on armaments, while 1.3 billion people are still living in a state of abject poverty.

Now I would like to address the situation in the Middle East and the crisis of the peace process.

The Israeli Government is still stalling in the implementation of agreements and putting impediments and obstacles in the way of achieving a just and comprehensive peace. Israel is undermining the peace process by building settlements, reneging on agreements and commitments reached with the Palestinian Authority, imposing a blockade on the Palestinian people, depriving them of their rights and flouting international legality. This generates violence and counter-violence. The Israeli policy runs counter to General Assembly resolutions and Security Council resolutions, especially resolutions 242 (1967), 271 (1969), 298 (1971), 478 (1980) and 672 (1990). They all provide that all legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel aimed at altering the legal status and demographic composition of the occupied Arab territories, including the city of Jerusalem, are null and void, and have no legal relevance. They also run counter to the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 concerning the protection of civilians and their properties in time of war. Therefore, the international community is called upon to exert pressure on the Israeli Government to make it desist immediately from implementing the policies that jeopardize the peace process as a whole.

The Arab leaders affirmed last year at the Cairo summit that peace in the Middle East is a strategic option. They underlined the importance of having all the parties committed to the Madrid formula that calls for a peace based on the principle of land for peace. This means that Israel should withdraw completely from all the occupied Palestinian and Arab territories, including East Jerusalem, to enable the Palestinian people to establish their independent State, with Arab Jerusalem as its capital. It should also withdraw completely from the Syrian Golan and from southern Lebanon to the internationally recognized borders, in keeping with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978).

There has been a noticeable improvement over the last five years on the road to achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It started with the Madrid Conference and moved on to Oslo and the subsequent peace accords. Several economic conferences were held to promote the Middle East peace process and to contribute to moving it forward by underscoring the common interests of the peoples of the region.

To that effect, arrangements are being made to hold a fourth economic summit conference for the Middle East and North Africa next November in Doha, the capital of my country. In this connection, I would emphasize that the State of Qatar has no private interest in acting as host for this conference. Our interest in holding it is based on the following reasons.

First, we believe that peace is a strategic choice that the Arab countries have adopted since the Madrid Conference.

Secondly, such a conference would manifest our desire for the peace process to continue. Failure of the peace process would have serious implications and would threaten peace both at the regional and at the international level.

Thirdly, our region has witnessed many wars in past years, the last of which was the 1991 Gulf War, which have impeded economic and political progress in our region and imposed on us huge expenditures on armaments at the expense of the social development and well-being of our peoples.

Fourthly, at the 1995 Amman Economic Summit the State of Qatar committed itself to acting as host to the fourth summit conference, and honouring that commitment is a question of our credibility as a State that respects its commitments.

Some are of the opinion that the conference should be cancelled due to current Israeli policy that does not respect undertakings and agreements, flouts international legality and tries to marginalize the role of the United Nations. Although we in Qatar understand the reasons behind such an opinion, which calls for the cancellation of the conference in response to the practices of the Israeli Government, which has not respected its

international commitments, we do respect our international commitments, and we believe that no State should have veto power with regard to the peace process. We have therefore decided to act as host to the conference on its appointed date. If it does not prove to be successful and fails to achieve the desired results, the Government of Israel will bear sole responsibility.

The State of Qatar welcomes the position of the United States of America, as expressed by its Secretary of State during our meeting in Saudi Arabia and here in New York. We also welcome the resolve it has shown in dealing with the disruption of the peace process in the Middle East, as well as the fact that it has underlined the principle of land for peace, the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the inadmissibility of taking unilateral measures that run counter to the peace process.

My country also appreciates the position of the States of the European Union, as well as the Russian Federation for their support of the peace process in the Middle East.

The State of Qatar views with satisfaction and appreciation the positions taken by States that support the Middle East peace process and reject the Israeli settlement policies that are obstructing that process. At the same time, my country stresses the importance of the role of the United Nations in the Middle East peace process and opposes any attempts to exclude it.

The State of Qatar joins the other fraternal members of the Gulf Cooperation Council in their endeavour to promote security and stability in the Gulf region, which is of strategic and vital importance to the entire world. The State of Qatar is making a constructive effort in that context with the aim of establishing good and constructive relations with all countries of the region on the basis of good-neighbourliness, mutual respect, non-intervention in the internal affairs of others, respect for international legality and the settlement of disputes through peaceful means, dialogue and mediation or by arbitration under international law. The State of Qatar supports the settlement of the dispute between the United Arab Emirates and the Islamic Republic of Iran over the three islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb by those means.

My Government and people have expressed their fraternal feelings and strong empathy towards the brotherly people of Iraq, who are living in extremely difficult circumstances resulting from the sanctions imposed on them. We have therefore welcomed the oil-for-food agreement between the United Nations and Iraq to alleviate the suffering of the fraternal people of Iraq and to provide them with such basic necessities as food and medicine. My Government has also emphasized the importance of respecting Iraq's sovereignty, territorial integrity and regional security. We condemn any foreign interference in its internal affairs. In the same context, my Government affirms the importance of implementation by the Government of Iraq of the relevant resolutions of the Security Council, in particular those concerning the release of Kuwaiti prisoners and detainees and other nationals in the same conditions. Such steps would help the international community to lift the embargo imposed on Iraq and would also enable Iraq to carry out a constructive role in achieving security, stability and rehabilitation in the region.

My Government also expresses its concern for the suffering to which the brotherly people of Libya are being subjected due to the sanctions imposed against that country because of the Lockerbie issue. In that connection, the State of Qatar calls for the creation of a uniform and agreed regime for imposing sanctions and of mechanisms to lift them subsequently in a manner that does not distinguish among States and peoples and that strikes a balance between international interests, on the one hand, and the suffering to which peoples are subjected, on the other.

Last week the Security Council devoted a meeting to addressing the problems of disputes and wars in some African countries. It considered ways of containing and solving such problems. The State of Qatar, which has fraternal relations with the African countries, is pained to witness the current state of affairs in States such as the Sudan, Somalia, the Comoros, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and the Congo. We believe that the African States are capable of overcoming their plight if they receive the necessary international support, particularly for the purpose of improving their economies and the transfer of technology in an international partnership in which all would participate.

My country was one of the first to welcome the Dayton Peace Agreement because we believe in the importance of peace and cooperation in the Balkans. We have therefore supported the reconstruction of the Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. We have also made contacts with our neighbour countries to urge them to cooperate with each other to help rehabilitate the region, develop its resources, link it to the international economy and improve the situation of its peoples.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that in order to solve the problems the world is facing it is imperative for us to work together for the benefit of mankind.

Address by The Honourable Edison James, Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Legal Affairs, Labour and Immigration of the Commonwealth of Dominica

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Legal Affairs, Labour and Immigration of the Commonwealth of Dominica.

The Honourable Edison James, Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Legal Affairs, Labour and Immigration of the Commonwealth of Dominica, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Legal Affairs, Labour and Immigration of the Commonwealth of Dominica, His Excellency The Honourable Edison James, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. James (Dominica): I recall two years ago, when, on the occasion of the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, this podium was the focus of attention. There was much enthusiasm and hope as leaders looked back on the past 50 years and looked forward to the next 50 and the coming of the new millennium. I had the honour to be among world leaders who shared the privilege of participating in that historic occasion. It was then that we as leaders made a number of pledges and committed ourselves to effecting necessary and appropriate changes to reshape and reform the United Nations. We pledged never to repeat the mistakes of the past and to work for a better world through an improved and more dynamic United Nations.

I take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the fifty-second session and to thank Ambassador Razali Ismail for his work in guiding the fifty-first session. It is with profound pleasure and a sincere sense of hope and expectation that I welcome and congratulate our new Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. I assure him that he has the full confidence and support of the Commonwealth of Dominica in his endeavours.

Notwithstanding the leadership changes, if we are to achieve our ultimate goal of a better world for all, much more must happen. The reform of the United Nations, which has been the subject of such intense debate for so long now, must become a reality. We have noted and taken seriously your commitment, Mr. President, to encourage action-oriented discussions on measures and proposals that encompass the reform of the United Nations system. It is our wish that the discussion, as vital a part of the process as it is, will be as short-lived as possible and that the implementation of reforms which we all want to see will very soon be effected.

The people of this world are demanding reform. The Organization itself needs the reform. Let us do it now. The numbers, geographic representation and decision-making process of the principal organs of the United Nations must urgently reflect the realities of the new millennium.

Membership in the United Nations is based on the sovereign equality of its Members. Whether we are small or whether we are big, we are worthy of respect. And we all have an obligation to work towards maintaining international peace and security; achieving international cooperation in solving economic, social, cultural or humanitarian problems; and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms.

We do not expect to be in an Organization where the rule is the law of the jungle; that is, the survival of the fittest. Rules and regulations of any organization which can be interpreted and implemented in a manner which threatens the survival and the very existence of its members are undesirable.

Most of us are members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and I wish to bring it to the attention of the General Assembly and of all representatives that recent decisions taken in the WTO at the request of some Members of this very United Nations are threatening to destroy the livelihood of smaller nations. The Commonwealth of Dominica, my country, and other countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are threatened by this action. Our main means of livelihood -- bananas — has been placed on the shakiest of grounds by this decision. Such uncertainty brings about instability and can threaten peace.

While the General Assembly has no enforcement authority, its resolutions and recommendations to Member States carry the political and moral force of

majority approval. I appeal then to Member States to use whatever is in their power to persuade the complainants against the European banana marketing regime to consider the consequences of their action and to think again.

Cliches like "desperate times call for desperate measures" and "a hungry man is an angry man" may sound banal, but they cannot be ignored. Peace in our region and peace in the world depend much on the humanitarian dispensation of justice. The action which has been taken against us in the WTO is not justice.

The *raison d'être* for the establishment of the United Nations was to maintain peace and security. You, Mr. President, in your address to this body recognized that peace and security are threatened by international terrorism. May I draw to your attention that peace and security can also be threatened by economic terrorism. Our region is now threatened by economic terrorism, and our Organization — the United Nations — has a responsibility and a duty to ensure that no form of terrorism succeeds in undermining our peace and security.

This matter is so serious that I urge the Secretary-General to pay a visit to the now tranquil and peaceful Caribbean region, starting in the Windward Islands, to get a sense of the situation for himself. For there is a flame ignited in that area which has the potential to transform itself into a conflagration of a magnitude capable of engulfing the entire hemisphere.

In May of this year in Bridgetown, Barbados, CARICOM and the United States entered into a Partnership for Prosperity and Security in the Caribbean. Our ability to meet our obligations for implementation of the Plan of Action will be seriously compromised by this decision of the WTO which seeks to deny us the opportunity to earn our living.

Our Caribbean region is often described as paradise, but sometimes there can be trouble in paradise. Our region is prone to natural disasters. Hurricanes, earthquakes and floods are not uncommon, and the world knows of the slow destruction of the island of Montserrat by the volcanic eruptions which have been going on now for over two years. Member States of CARICOM have come to the help of this small territory, however there continues to be a great need for humanitarian assistance, and we look to the Members of the United Nations for their meaningful contribution to rebuilding the Emerald Isle.

Man-made threats also plague our region, one such being the trans-shipment of hazardous waste through the Caribbean Sea. The indiscriminate pollution of the sea, the destruction of marine life by the discharge of waste into the waterway by ocean liners, and the trans-shipment of illegal drugs and arms all pose serious threats to the orderly development of the region. There is a need to establish a regime under the auspices of the United Nations to stem such practices.

We cannot help but lament that after 50 years and more our world has not yet found that peace for which this body was instituted. In the past years we have seen the struggles in the former Yugoslavia and in Central Africa. We have witnessed the scourge of ethnic cleansing and killings. And the Middle East remains unsettled. Unrest in any part of the world affects us all. It is therefore our responsibility to work towards that total peace.

We congratulate the 100 nations which have signed the Treaty banning the production and dissemination of landmines. Such weapons of destruction do not deserve to exist in a civilized world. We trust that nations which are still hesitating will soon come around and sign — and eventually ratify — the Treaty.

For there to be peace we must acknowledge the right of peoples and nations to exist, regardless of colour, class, race, creed, political belief or model of government. This decade was declared the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. We are happy to report that in the Commonwealth of Dominica the first peoples of the Caribbean, the Caribs, coexist peacefully with the rest of the population. It is our intention to work diligently with the Secretary-General so that before this decade is over there will be some tangible and positive impact on the lives of our own indigenous people which would give meaning to the noble intentions of this body in making this declaration.

The Commonwealth of Dominica as a member of CARICOM, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), is heartened by the spread of democracy throughout the hemisphere. We intend to play our part to ensure that this movement is not transient, but, rather, reflects a deep-rooted conviction of our people that this is indispensable for development and prosperity.

We respect the right of all countries to chose their own model of government, while at the same time we

urge all Members of the Organization to practice or continue to practice the democratic process and to provide for their people full opportunity to enjoy all the benefits of a democratic society.

It is against this background that the Government and people of the Commonwealth of Dominica call again on this world body not to continually close its ears to the pleas of the Republic of China for international recognition. It must be remembered that the Republic of China is a founding Member of this Organization and has been a Member for the greater part of its existence. The Republic of China on Taiwan is a politically democratic and economically dynamic society with a directly elected Government and Parliament. Dominica therefore urges Member States not to continue to ignore or block the efforts being made to admit the Republic of China to membership of this and other international bodies.

Peace in this world also requires that the hungry be fed, the homeless sheltered, the ignorant educated, all people enjoy good health, and our patrimony — the Earth — kept in a condition that we all can enjoy. We applaud and encourage the efforts of international organizations — including United Nations specialized agencies, which work to satisfy these needs and aspirations.

The effective functioning of this Organization requires proper management of its resources, both human and financial. We encourage the Secretary-General in his efforts in this regard, and we call upon all members to do their best to provide the necessary financial support to the limits of their ability. I take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Ted Turner on his generous donation to the Organization and, like him, call upon others to do likewise. I am convinced that the Secretary-General will use this gift most wisely and judiciously, knowing that proper utilization of these funds will dispose others to come forward.

Every country, even the most developed ones, has its needs. We in Dominica, a developing country, have many. Globalization and trade liberalization, combined with the impact of natural disasters, have increased the urgency for diversifying our economy. In this regard, attention is being paid to our human resource capacity, to take advantage of the revolution in technology and communication.

A major thrust in the process of diversification is tourism, but tourism with a difference: ecotourism. Earlier I mentioned the need to preserve and conserve the Earth for the enjoyment of all. My country Dominica has much to offer to visitors who want to enjoy nature, and we are working hard to make ourselves the ecotourism destination of the Caribbean. Some of those listening to me may have visited Dominica and know how difficult it is to enter there. We are taking steps to make it easier to visit my country by the construction of a 24-hour landing facility for long-range aircraft. We trust that our approach to friendly nations and institutions for assistance in this regard will receive favourable consideration.

The beginning of the new millennium is close at hand. Two years ago we all pledged to redouble our efforts to work towards fulfilling the obligations we assumed when we became Members of this great Organization. Let none of us waver in our resolve. The key to it all lies in our working together as Members of the United Nations. Let us join hands and wills to build this better world. History will judge us harshly if we do not.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Legal Affairs, Labour and Immigration of the Commonwealth of Dominica for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Edison James, Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, Legal Affairs, Labour and Immigration of the Commonwealth of Dominica, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ivan Antonovich, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Belarus.

Mr. Antonovich (Belarus): It gives me particular pleasure to congratulate you, Sir, the distinguished representative of Ukraine, on your election to the responsible post of President of the fifty-second of the General Assembly of the United Nations. I am convinced that your rich and profound experience in diplomatic relations, together with your personal qualities, will facilitate the constructive work of this General Assembly session and make it an outstanding international event. The delegation of the Republic of Belarus is ready to contribute to your endeavours in any way required. I would also like to use this opportunity to say a word of gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Razali Ismail, for his competent and efficient presidency during the fifty-first session of the General Assembly.

Every day, international life and international relations acquire ever more multidimensional and ever deeper significance, with new meanings and trends in development that can no longer be constrained within the criteria and standards of the twentieth century. We live at a time oriented towards the future. A *fin de siècle* mentality is not just a nostalgic feeling for the century passing away, but also embraces a deep concern for the years ahead. The destiny of mankind, however contradictory and diverse, and the interests of nations and States may become more amenable to one common denominator, are increasingly concerned with the well-being of humanity, and display numerous convergent features which make it possible now to discuss the opportunity for a new international order.

Entering the twenty-first century, with its new international order, does not mean that we renounce the experience of the last 52 years in the development of the family of nations under one common programme, as set out for us by the founding fathers of the United Nations and outlined in its Charter. On the contrary, it means adjusting these lofty aims to the new realities of a multifaceted world and also making the Organization — no matter how different its separate parts are — the mainstream of human development, where the economic well-being of people brings to an end age-old ills such as starvation and epidemic diseases, as well as huge environmental threats, and which helps to achieve multilateral understanding between those participating in this development. Solving these problems is becoming the overriding ambition and the main goal and hope of the United Nations, as well as of mankind as a whole.

Right now, the United Nations has started displaying its capacity to adapt its structure and policies to the demands of the future. The orientation of the United Nations towards the future is the overriding goal that was established for it during its fiftieth anniversary celebrations. The change of leadership and the measures that are now being undertaken in this direction give sufficient grounds for optimism. We declare our support for these goals and actions. With a sense of trust and the intention to contribute, we take note of the actions of the new Secretary-General, Mr. Annan, in regard to reform within the United Nations. In this respect, I would like to quote from a letter dated 5 September 1997 sent by the President of the Republic of Belarus, Mr. Lukashenka, to the Secretary-General:

> "These reforms are a timely and meaningful response to the objectives facing the United Nations during this complex period at the turning point of the millennia, including problems which ought to be solved with the purpose of enhancing the effectiveness of the United Nations system.
>
> "The Republic of Belarus is in favour of a pragmatic, comprehensive approach to United Nations reform which would provide for the strengthening, on the basis of the opportunities available, of the United Nations potential in peacekeeping, humanitarian and informational fields."

In our opinion, these measures are very important and represent an up-to-date response to the need to settle the issues coming before the United Nations during this complex historical period as we approach the end of the millennium. These issues need to be solved in order to enhance the functional efficiency of the family of the United Nations. When we speak of reform in the United Nations, we have in mind first and foremost an effective distribution of United Nations resources, the streamlining of the Organization's administrative and organizational structures, and budgetary and structural reform of the United Nations Secretariat, as well as personnel adjustments to meet the challenges of the modern world.

When addressing United Nations reform, we place special emphasis on the reform of the Security Council, which is one of the principal United Nations bodies, responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Extremely critical in this respect is, of course, the principle of balanced representation of all regional groups of United Nations Member States on the reformed Security Council. The Republic of Belarus is convinced that allocation of one more non-permanent seat on the Security Council to the Group of Eastern European States — whose membership has more than doubled in recent years — is in full compliance with the provisions of Article 23 of the United Nations Charter, which sets forth the principle of equitable geographical distribution.

Among all the new realities that are being brought into the mosaic of international relations, efficient mechanisms for global and regional security still seem paramount. Belarus considers its national security to be inalienably connected and identified with the collective security system of the European continent. Each State has, of course, ample right independently to select the most efficient means of protecting its own national

interests, including the right to participate in regional security organizations.

For the last two years Belarus has displayed a firm stance against the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as a military bloc. I hope for understanding on the part of the international community in this respect. In the event that we had on our western borders not the friendly sovereign Polish State we have now but a military organization, it would certainly push us to seriously analyse and reconsider our national security considerations.

However, recently we have noticed developments inside the NATO structure itself. We took due note of several meetings of NATO member States regarding the transformation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council into the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, as well as the transformation of the major military aims of NATO itself.

Taking into account current realities, we would like to reiterate our position against NATO's expansion as a military organization, but also to add to it that we are in favour of its development into a universal European organization for peace and security. It is with this intention that we have entered into negotiations with NATO and presented a programme for Belarusian participation in the Partnership for Peace. We sincerely hope that by developing a more constructive approach we will reach a mutual understanding, which could be reinforced by some mutual obligations.

We would also like to state that with this evolution of NATO and a thorough analysis of existing world and regional security systems and treaties, further emphasis should be attached to well-established regional organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and to their closer cooperation with the United Nations and its specialized agencies.

As to the OSCE, we feel certain that it has already accumulated profound experience and skills in tackling many important security issues and is able to make a major contribution to strengthening peace and security on the continent. Therefore, the Republic of Belarus readily supports the initiatives of Russia and the Netherlands concerning a number of special events to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the First Peace Conference. Should this conference take place in 1999, it would be an important opportunity to discuss the complex problems of peaceful cooperation between Member States and to find and elaborate means to constructively handle major issues of contention and also to strengthen the legal foundations of international actions for peace.

I should like to state that the Republic of Belarus, as one of the founding Members of the United Nations, has always spoken strongly in favour of the peaceful regulation of military conflicts in different regions of the globe and of elaborating new and efficient measures to prevent the emergence of new crisis situations. That is why we share the approach of many who have spoken here, when they expressed concern about the development of the situation in the Middle East. It is our opinion that the continuation of the Arab-Israeli dialogue, which will live up to the agreements previously reached, is a must to stop terrorism in this region, to put an end to the non-stop bloodletting of innocent people and to establish a firm and lasting peace.

The same can also be said of the Balkans, which is now one of the hottest spots in the European region. We are convinced that lasting peace in the former Yugoslavia is possible only under conditions where violence is renounced and where the parties involved settle their conflicts in a peaceful manner.

The Republic of Belarus invites the General Assembly to enable the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as a founding Member, to resume its participation in the work of the General Assembly and other bodies of the United Nations.

Unfortunately, conflicts, including military clashes, are still a reality of humanity's everyday existence. We call upon the Security Council to be more prudent in handling these conflicts, to be more diligent in seeking peaceful means to regulate them, avoiding at all costs economic destruction as well as the political and moral damage that comes with attempts to apply sanctions.

I should like to seize this opportunity to confirm the willingness of the Government of the Republic of Belarus to host the Minsk international Conference on conflict settlement in Nagorny Karabakh.

As members know, Belarus has always been among those nations which have spoken and acted strongly to make effective measures undertaken by the United Nations in the field of disarmament. I should like to remind the Assembly that Belarus was one of the first Commonwealth of Independent States countries, after the breakup of the Soviet Union, to withdraw nuclear

weapons from its territory. Belarus aims to achieve further progress in the field of disarmament, in particular by banning chemical, bacteriological and other toxic weapons, by putting an end to research into new weapons of mass destruction, and by preventing an arms race in space. Awareness of these aims means a more secure future for our children.

The Belarusian position on disarmament issues is firm and logically predictable. Apart from our refusal to station nuclear weapons on our soil, we have suggested creating a nuclear-free zone in the centre of Europe. I must admit that so far the response to this initiative has been tepid, at best. But I would also reiterate that no matter the tepid response, only the creation of regions entirely free from nuclear weapons and the nuclear threat will facilitate each important step along the road to the eventual comprehensive renouncement of nuclear weapons.

Apart from general support for the reform programmes of the United Nations, I should like to emphasize the particularly positive approach of Belarus to the idea and the philosophy of sustainable development. Pursuant to the decisions and recommendations adopted by the Rio 1992 Earth Summit, the Government of the Republic of Belarus worked out a national strategy for sustainable development, whose outline was presented to the General Assembly's special session last June.

We appreciate the great assistance rendered to us by the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, which helped us to hold our conference on sustainable development in Minsk in April 1997, which was attended by representatives of 30 countries and more than 30 international organizations. That conference was an important landmark on the path to working out an international strategy for sustainable development and outlined many of the important issues that are now faced by countries in a period of transition. I sincerely believe that the sustainable development programme launched by the United Nations will encourage the participation of other multilateral organizations in its implementation, in particular, the World Trade Organization, which could advance reforms in countries whose economies are in transition by accepting them as full members. We fervently hope that the Agenda for Development, as a long-term policy of the United Nations, will not only provide reliable mechanisms to deal with international catastrophes, such as the Chernobyl accident and others, but will also help establish a system to prevent such catastrophes and eliminate their consequences in all parts of the world.

I should like to emphasize that the Chernobyl-related activities of the United Nations as well as the international assistance in mitigating the consequences of that nuclear catastrophe are highly appreciated by the people of Belarus. Yet the assistance is needed right now — today — though we will need it in the future as well. That is a tragic reality the Republic of Belarus is living through.

As members are aware, sometimes and in some areas Belarus has been the object of criticism because of the slowness of reform and democratic transformations. Concern has been expressed regarding certain internal developments in the Republic of Belarus. While I would certainly acknowledge that some of the international community's concern has been justified, I would like very much to say that the Republic of Belarus is a sovereign State that develops its own policy with due regard for the opportunities — economic, social, moral and psychological — of its citizens, within the limits of international patterns of behaviour and with respect for human rights and personal freedoms.

It has been an uneasy path, but so far the Republic of Belarus has avoided the pitfalls in economic and political areas, and with the due assistance of the international community expects to attain certain standards compatible with the developed countries of the world. Now we are practically the only country of the Commonwealth of Independent States that had a stable economic growth of about 16 per cent during the first half of this year; we have arrested the decrease in volumes of industrial production and we are a country free from religious, ethnic or civil strife.

Of course, there are many difficulties still ahead of us. But as long as a consensus of the people is secured on major development programmes and aims, the institutes of government and democracy are stable, and international cooperation proceeds within acceptable international norms. There is hope that we shall accomplish the goals set before us.

Difficult as it might be, we have made quite a few positive steps to assure the United Nations that we are seriously focused on strengthening our participation in this international body. No matter what objective financial or other economic difficulties Belarus is experiencing, we seek to fulfil our financial obligations

before the United Nations. This year, the Government of Belarus has allotted the first instalment to gradually liquidate our arrears to the regular United Nations budget, and before the year is over we plan to contribute another $5 million. However, we hope more careful consideration can be given to reaching a fair solution in the settlement of the issue related to the payment by Belarus of its arrears in financial contributions to the United Nations regular budget and financing the United Nations peacekeeping operations.

I would take up this issue, not to emphasize the need to avoid payments, but to invite the international community to distinguish between the cases when payment is not made due to objective difficulties and when it results from the absence of will on the part of some Member States to contribute in accordance with the principle of the capacity to pay, or is an attempt to exert pressure on the United Nations and the policy it implements. There must be a common quest for special solutions to further revise the scale of assessments, to reconstruct debt in cases where economic conditions of this or that Member State do not allow for the regular payment to be made in time.

During the limited time afforded to us, it is not possible to cover the whole range of problems which confront the United Nations and which involve special actions and responsibilities of Member States. I have outlined only those which the Government of Belarus considers of the first priority to be addressed in order to secure the normal functioning of the United Nations.

I would like to close my statement on a note of cautious optimism. There are many indicators that the United Nations is advancing in the right direction, and the participation of Member States in the United Nations programmes of settling major global issues is a shade better today than it was yesterday. With all those shades blending into a positive optimistic colour, the future of humanity is more secure today than it was yesterday, and certainly a lot more secure than it was before yesterday.

The President: The next speaker is His Excellency Mr. Modibo Sidibe, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mali and for Malians Living Abroad. I give him the floor.

Mr. Sidibe (Mali) (*interpretation from French*): May I first of all congratulate you, Mr. President, most sincerely on your outstanding election to the presidency of the United Nations General Assembly at its fifty-second session. I have no doubt that thanks to your eminent qualities and your rich experience you will carry out remarkably well the mission entrusted to you. You may be assured of the complete support of the delegation of Mali.

I also want to express our appreciation and thanks to your predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail, for the important contribution he made to the last session as President of the General Assembly.

To the new Secretary-General of the Organization, Mr. Kofi Annan, I would like to express my fraternal and warmest congratulations. His election on 17 December 1996 was a tribute to the eminent qualities of a man who has devoted his life to the service of the United Nations. While wishing him every success in the difficult mission conferred upon him, it is my firm conviction that he will do honour to his continent, Africa, in guiding our Organization towards the next millennium.

As this fifty-second session of the General Assembly opens this year, the United Nations is at a crossroads. Two years ago in this very Hall, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, 128 Heads of State or Government forcefully reaffirmed their faith in the United Nations in its principles and its objectives. They unanimously appealed for profound reflection on the role and resources of the world Organization so that it might be given the human, material and financial capacities that are vital to its mission, and so that it might be able to enter the twenty-first century with determination and professionalism.

This appeal was not in vain. Under the dynamic leadership of the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, whose courage and lucidity I wish to commend, our Organization has today embarked on an ambitious programme of reform. On 14 July last Mr. Kofi Annan, continuing the work of his predecessor, submitted to the General Assembly his report on the reform of the United Nations. Like other Member States, Mali is now considering the proposals contained in that report and will without delay submit its observations thereon. My delegation is delighted at the political will expressed by all to initiate the appropriate reforms in order to make our Organization better able to respond to the needs of our day and to the aspirations of the peoples for which it was created.

While on the topic of reform, I cannot gloss over the substantial progress made by Member States in the different working groups of the General Assembly. 1997 will mark the crowning of sustained efforts, including the fulfilment of the mandates given to the Working Groups

on, respectively, the Agenda for Development and the strengthening of the United Nations system. The unanimous adoption by the General Assembly of the documents that endorsed the often difficult and painstaking deliberations of these two Working Groups eloquently reflects our shared will to succeed, by consensus, in laying the groundwork for the restructuring and modernization of our Organization in the priority fields of development and economic cooperation.

As for the reform of the Security Council, the high-level Working Group established to study this issue has made considerable progress, although concrete measures have not been adopted on such fundamental items as the expansion and composition of the Council, and thee use of the right of veto.

However, I welcome the many constructive and often complementary proposals that have enriched the debates this year. I am convinced that by redoubling our efforts we will be able to benefit from the momentum that has been created, and that we will succeed in restructuring and modernizing the Security Council by making it more democratic and credible as well as more legitimate and transparent.

The maintenance of peace and security, we know, requires the prevention, management and settlement of crises — of which there unfortunately are still a large number, often pernicious. These crises are currently sources of grave concern to the entire international community, and particularly to Africa, where some countries continue to be afflicted by multifaceted conflicts. In this respect, it is gratifying to note that significant advances have been made here and there towards the restoration of peace and security.

My delegation is gratified at the dynamic process that led on 20 July to the holding of general, free and credible elections in Liberia, marking the end of a long and brutal civil war and the establishment in that country of democratic institutions. This victory, which is above all that of the people of Liberia themselves, must be welcomed as a successful example of the settlement of a regional conflict and should serve as a source of inspiration for the settlement of other crises.

Mali, which has played an active role in the settlement of the Liberian crisis in both the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and its Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), would like to recall here that assistance for the reconstruction of Liberia is the only means of consolidating the peace won at such cost. The results obtained by the Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Agreements are a good example of the virtues of direct dialogue and of international mediation.

My country welcomes the positive evolution of the crisis in the Central African Republic as a result of the commendable efforts of the International Mediation Committee established by the Nineteenth Summit Meeting of Heads of State and Government of France and Africa.

As regards Western Sahara, my delegation is pleased with the progress achieved at the end of the fourth round of private contacts on the implementation of the United Nations Settlement Plan, with a view to the organization of a referendum for self-determination.

Conversely, the existence of other centres of tension and breaches of democratic order are of grave concern. This is the case in Angola, where the delaying tactics of the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) are putting a severe strain on the peace process under way. My country supports without reservation the measures recently decided upon by the Security Council relating to this party to the conflict.

Likewise, in Sierra Leone, the situation is extremely confused because of the obstinacy of the leaders of the military *coup d'état* in holding on to power in spite of the pressure exerted by the United Nations, the Organization of African Unity and, more particularly the Economic Community of West African States whose select ministerial committee has courageously and selflessly undertaken difficult negotiations in order to achieve the re-establishment of constitutional order with the return of the democratically elected president.

My country, which is a member of the International Mediation Committee in the Republic of the Congo, is gravely concerned by the situation of widespread civil war prevailing in that country. Once again, we appeal to the sense of responsibility of the parties and ask them to engage resolutely and very quickly in a political settlement of the crisis so that the mediation process can be brought to a successful conclusion.

This crucial moment for Africa is equally crucial for the Middle East, where the dynamic of peace that began with the Madrid Conference is increasingly being called into question by the recent serious events. This is the time and place to call urgently on the co-sponsors of the

peace process and the international community as a whole to take further initiatives to safeguard the peace process, *inter alia* by persuading the parties to resume the negotiations as a matter of urgency with a view to the application of the agreements that have been concluded.

My country, Mali, also remains concerned by the persistence of the sanctions against Member States of our Organization, in particular the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, and by the suffering the sanctions cause for the peoples of these countries.

For more than 50 years, the realization of the ideal of disarmament has been at the centre of our constant concern to build a system of collective security, free of weapons of mass destruction. From this viewpoint significant progress has been made towards, in particular, the reduction and ultimate elimination of nuclear arsenals. In this respect, Mali welcomes the entry into force on 29 April 1997 of the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction.

Nevertheless, the objective of general and complete disarmament has still to be achieved. On the basis of this conviction, Mali has demonstrated its commitment to this goal by taking concrete initiatives at the international, regional and national levels. Evidence of this is the resolution initiated by my country in 1994 and co-sponsored by about 20 Member States, regarding "Assistance to States for curbing the illicit traffic in small arms and collecting them". This initiative by Mali, which contributed to initiating the now well-known concept of "microdisarmament" within our Organization, is aimed at drawing the attention of the international community to the disastrous consequences of small arms, particularly in the developing countries where, as we know, they play a large part in fuelling conflicts.

All this emphasizes how important it is urgently to support the efforts of the countries of the Saharo-Sahelian subregion in order to stem the phenomenon of the proliferation of small arms, especially through effective control of borders and the review of legal instruments regarding the bearing of arms.

Along the same lines, from 24 to 28 March 1997, the Government of Mali organized, together with the United Nations Department of Political Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), a "Week of Peace" to commemorate the first anniversary of the "Flame of Peace". The international forum, held on that occasion, which brought together the representatives of the countries of the subregion and of the institutions and bodies to which I have just referred, gave an opportunity to analyse the factors that led to the restoration of peace in the northern regions of Mali and to identify ways and means of ensuring lasting peace and of promoting a real culture of peace.

I would like here to echo the fervent appeal made at that forum for good governance, which favours participation over exclusion and dialogue over confrontation, and which assures respect for democratic principles and human rights. I also wish, from this rostrum, to make an appeal to the international community to give its full support to the proposal for a moratorium on the import, export and production of light weapons that was formulated during the consultations held at the same time as the "Week of Peace". In addition to the countries of the West African subregion, these consultations brought together representatives of the United Nations, OAU, the ECOWAS/Togo agreement on non-aggression and defence assistance (ANAD), and our development partners.

Furthermore, the conflicts in recent years have shown that conventional weapons can also cause mass destruction. For that reason my country welcomed the adoption on 18 September 1997 of the Convention on the total ban of anti-personnel mines, and supports the international efforts, including the Ottawa process, to achieve the total elimination of anti-personnel mines at the global level.

The values of peace, freedom and economic and social justice which inspired the founding fathers of the United Nations must remain today, more than ever, the foundations of the joint action incumbent on us in the quest for a decent life for everyone. In this respect, we must, together and in a united way, seek concerted solutions to the persistent problems of underdevelopment.

Thus, from New York in 1990, with the World Summit for Children, to Rome in 1996 with the World Food Summit, the great international conferences of the decade have contributed remarkably to the preparation of a new design for human society at the dawning of the third millennium. The paradigm of sustainable development, based on economic growth that is sustained, socially equitable and ecologically viable, constitutes the common denominator on which the international community now agrees in order to give new

direction to the collective search for the economic and social well-being of our peoples. The mixed results of last June's special session of the General Assembly devoted to an overall evaluation of the implementation of Agenda 21 are a sharp reminder of the vital need to think for our world globally and act collectively to meet the challenges confronting our planet.

Regardless of the angle from which we approach them, the problems at the end of this century cannot be resolved except through concerted and integrated action — action capable of managing harmoniously the upheavals accompanying this changing period of history. The consensus achieved in the Agenda for Development shows our shared faith in the virtues of a new global partnership for development, based on the imperative of interdependence and on mutually beneficial action.

Since the conceptual framework has been defined and accepted by all, it is now time — and high time — to move to action through a rational mobilization of resources in keeping with the generous goals formulated in the Agenda for Development.

The settlement of the debt crisis, just remuneration for commodities, the renunciation of trade barriers and an increase in official development assistance — this is essentially the direction that needs to be taken in order to build a world that is more accommodating to all, so true is it that our global village cannot be built in a lasting way if the majority of its members are excluded. The fight against poverty in this context has absolute priority, because it is simply unacceptable at the dawning of the third millennium that millions of men and women throughout the world should continue to lack the minimal conditions for a decent life. The aspiration of peoples for a better life is a legitimate quest which cannot be ignored.

As Mali sees it, any work towards sustainable development is above all a national responsibility, through the effective definition and application of sound macroeconomic policies, based on transparency, the pre-eminent rule of law, the practice of democracy, respect for human rights, social justice, and the participation of all in the effort of national development. For my country, this is the surest path to follow in our quest for the shared ideal assigned to us by the United Nations Charter:

> "to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom".

We are on the eve of a new millennium, which will see the emergence of new challenges and new threats, but also of great dreams and hopes for humankind.

As responsible leaders of our States, we have an obligation to seek ways and means to meet these challenges. But we also need to guide in the right direction the aspirations of our peoples to live in peace, liberty, progress and active solidarity.

Fifty-two years ago the founding fathers of our Organization cleared the way for us to attain these noble objectives, which are still relevant. If we apply the terms of the Charter, we will be able to respond to particular uncertainties and put an end to the climate of doubt, fear and suspicion that characterizes present day international relations.

We must also agree to do more and to do better in our quest for a better future for the human race. We believe in the United Nations as the institution to help us achieve this.

The President of the Republic of Mali, His Excellency Mr. Alpha Oumar Konaré, is convinced that a restructured, modernized United Nations, endowed with the essential capacity to act, can help to resolve our disputes, ensure more orderly management of world affairs and eliminate the injustice, disparity and egoism that threaten humankind.

That is why my country, Mali, will continue to work with enthusiasm and determination to ensure the emergence of a United Nations that is truly united in its diversity, at peace with itself and resolutely committed to the service of all peoples.

The President: I now call on the Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Gabon, His Excellency Mr. Casimir Oye Mba.

Mr. Oye Mba (Gabon) (*interpretation from French*): At the outset I should like to convey to you, Sir, the warm congratulations of the Government of Gabon and of my delegation on your outstanding election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session. I should also like to congratulate the other members of the Bureau.

In selecting you, Mr. President, our Assembly acknowledged your country's role in world politics and, above all, your personal qualities, which augur well for

the success of this session. I am indeed convinced that under your guidance our work will be directed towards continuing our discussions in greater depth, taking common positions on important issues and adopting resolutions with the broadest possible consensus.

I should like to express our appreciation to your predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Razali, for the excellent work he did during his presidency.

This is also the first opportunity I have had to express my heartfelt congratulations to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, on his election as head of our Organization. I assure him of Gabon's full support for all the efforts he will need to make to ensure the success of the action he takes in the service of the United Nations.

Mr. Mohammed (Ethiopia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

It is often said that the international context has changed, that the fields of activity of the States that we represent are being subjected to attacks on all sides as science and technology progress. The globalization of our economies, based on the proclaimed virtues of liberalism, has not yet yielded all that it could.

The new world order that we have so long hoped for has not yet arrived, because so many contradictions are woven into the fabric of international relations. Yet no one can fail to see that it represents both the matrix and the support essential to carrying out the reform of the United Nations so that it can better serve peace among nations and the development of their peoples.

I should like first to speak about peace, the chief wealth of nations, and I shall do so, of course, in the light of our own experience.

In Gabon our understanding of peace underlies all the political developments we have experienced and are still experiencing today. The organization of successive local, legislative and senatorial elections in a calm political and social context at the end of 1996 and early this year provided proof of the fundamental role of the democratic legitimacy sorely needed today for the exercise of political power.

This same perception underlies all the activities of which we are the beneficiaries and which have made Gabon, through the personal presence of its President, Omar Bongo, a country that enjoys the great friendship and trust of other members of the international community, especially its neighbours.

In fact, Gabon has contributed in a substantial and significant manner to easing the tension in many parts of Africa.

Gabon, together with Chad, Burkina Faso, Senegal and Mali, sent almost 300 soldiers as part of an African peacekeeping force to restore institutional stability in the Central African Republic.

On behalf of my country I should like to pay tribute to the Inter-African Mission to Monitor the Implementation of the Bangui Agreements, established by the Security Council.

Given the very disturbing situation in Congo (Brazzavile), and at the request of the Congolese parties, Gabon agreed to take charge of the international mediation committee, under the leadership of His Excellency El Hadj Omar Bongo, assisted by the joint United Nations/Organization of African Unity Special Representative, Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun. A similar request had already been made to President Bongo by our Congolese brothers during earlier crises, in 1992 and 1993. The current crisis, which erupted in early July 1997, is the longest and the most bloody — the official death toll is 4,000 to 5,000 — and the most complex.

Despite the many obstacles that this mediation effort is encountering, Gabon is doing its utmost to find a positive solution to this conflict. It is essentially a political and internal conflict, but it must be clear to everyone that the situation could drift out of control, with repercussions at the subregional and international levels. Even so, as the French writer Beaumarchais said,

> "As success becomes more difficult to achieve, the need for action becomes more pressing."

In this connection, I am pleased to note the encouraging reaction of the international community in general, and more specifically, of the European Union and France, which have voiced their support and renewed their expression of trust in international mediation and in the Head of State of Gabon, and have urged him to continue his efforts.

To give the Assembly an idea of what has been done, I would just like briefly to mention that President Bongo has proposed, on the one hand, a ceasefire

agreement and, on the other, a political agreement to cover the transitional period from now until the presidential elections.

The draft political agreement is the fifth one proposed since the negotiations began. It is based on the idea of power-sharing and the balanced participation of all political forces in terms of holding power during the transitional period. The breakdown is as follows. Mr. Lissouba will remain as President of the Republic and Head of State. To counterbalance this, as it were, a Prime Minister, the Head of Government, will be appointed by the President from among the members of the Opposition. In addition, three Vice-Presidents of the Republic are to be appointed by the Head of State.

We were unable to finalize this draft agreement during the discussions. Things started to happen quickly in Brazzaville: fighting continued; Mr. Kolelas, the Mayor of Brazzaville, who had been heading the national mediation efforts, was appointed Prime Minister; and a Government was set up. Of course, all this has meant that negotiations are on hold.

Against this background of uncertainty, President Bongo invited nine Heads of State of Central and Western Africa to a special meeting on the Congo which was held in Libreville on 14 and 15 September 1997. President Lissouba was unable to join his colleagues but he sent his Prime Minister, Mr. Kolelas.

The Libreville summit reaffirmed support for international mediation efforts led by President Bongo. It also made an urgent appeal to the warring factions to stop fighting and resolutely to continue with negotiations to try and find a political settlement to the crisis. So far, I have to say, the appeal has not met with the reaction on the ground we had hoped for. But we are still hopeful that discussions will soon be resumed, for this is the only way we are going to find a lasting and constructive settlement.

Faced with this situation, what have we done here in the United Nations? I should remind the Assembly that very soon after international mediation began, the President of the Republic of Gabon called for a commitment from the international community in terms of deploying an international force to separate the warring factions in Congo (Brazzaville).

Several African countries in a commendable upsurge of solidarity, responded favourably, expressing their willingness to provide troops for the international force. President Bongo brought the matter before the Security Council, which said it accepted the principle, but which imposed various conditions that, when analysed, leave one with the impression that if they were met there would be practically no point in sending the force.

Time is passing. Time is of the essence. Congolese people are still dying; others are fleeing their country; and thousands more are still wandering, distraught and desperate, in the forests of the Congo, seeking makeshift shelter.

Can we really continue calmly to sit in Manhattan or in the offices of our capitals and discuss what is going on? We know that in the recent past in other parts of the world the same cunning preventive measures — I was going to say the same procrastination — did not prevail. No, we must do something for the Congolese people. They are citizens of the world, our world, as well.

I must emphasize this: the impact of armed conflicts is so great that it is more necessary than ever to stress specific measures to prevent them. For developing countries, like mine, that cannot and must not afford the luxury of high military expenditure, the maintenance of international peace and security must be provided for "upstream" on the basis of preventive measures. It is because we believe deeply in this principle that the States in our subregion, Members of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa have been cooperating and taking action since 1992 to strengthen mutual trust and security at the subregional level.

These contacts have led, *inter alia*, to the signing in Yaoundé in July 1996, by virtually all the members of this Committee — except one — of a non-aggression pact, which is an important measure to strengthen peace.

More recently, at its ninth Ministerial Meeting, last July in Libreville, attended by four out of five representatives of the permanent members of the Security Council, we adopted a major plan of action whose main thrust is: the establishment of an early-warning mechanism as a way of preventing conflict in Central Africa; the organization in the medium term of a regional conference on democratic institutions and peace in Central Africa; and training seminars for law enforcement personnel on peacekeeping operations, with the goal of preparing countries of the subregion to participate, with United Nations assistance, in possible future peacekeeping operations.

In my capacity as Chairman of the Bureau of that Committee, I should like to draw the keen attention of all executive bodies operating under the aegis of the United Nations and the European Union, and our partners in the subregion, to the benefits of effectively establishing this early-warning mechanism before the end of 1997.

Still in that capacity, I wish to appeal to all Member States and to the international community as a whole to contribute to the Trust Fund set up by the Secretary-General to finance the work of the Committee.

Looking at the crises that have erupted recently in Central Africa, I have to say that today the subregion is facing the possibility of many conflicts flaring up, involving populations beyond our national boundaries, threatening the stability of our States and even calling into question the principle of the inviolability of borders — a principle that the Organization of African Unity has held dear since its inception. The danger is real. We must ward it off.

Through me, Gabon welcomes the United States initiative to convene a special meeting of the Security Council on the situation in Africa, the first of its kind. We are grateful for the fact that on that solemn occasion, on 25 September 1997, the Security Council reaffirmed its principal responsibility for the preservation of peace on our continent.

But how can we forget that United Nations files are bursting with piles of reports, declarations and resolutions on Africa, all of them equally relevant?

Everyone here will recall that some 10 years ago the General Assembly held a special session on Africa. Yes, I know — they say that now that the cold war has ended Africa is no longer of prime strategic importance. Too bad for us! For my part, I would say "So much the better for us", because we Africans have no reason to cry over the fall of the Berlin Wall. That was a tremendously important event for us too; it opened up new prospects. Today, however, the African peoples, just like others, are no longer willing to be paid in words and slogans. They thus expect concrete measures to emerge from the special meeting that was held by the Security Council last week.

Although Africa is no longer of prime strategic importance, is Africa not today, where the United Nations is concerned, its real challenge, I might even say its guilty conscience — because of the Organization's underlying philosophy and vocation?

Looking beyond Africa, Gabon is also greatly concerned over the blockage in the Middle East process, and we invite all the parties there to resume the dialogue, with the support of the whole of the international community, for there, as elsewhere, no lasting solution can be achieved through force.

The wars and conflicts we all deplore are made possible by the devastating force of weapons. We must therefore patiently and resolutely succeed in disarming the nations of the world.

Thus, we welcome the progress made in this area by the entry into force of the Convention on the prohibition of chemical weapons, which demonstrates the will of the international community to eliminate that category of weapons of mass destruction.

In the same connection, my country supports the Ottawa process aimed at a complete ban on anti-personnel landmines. The recent Oslo Diplomatic Conference on that subject worked along the lines we had hoped it would. We regret, however, that some countries were unable to join in the powerful and promising consensus that emerged there. We trust that in the near future they will be able to do so. The representative I sent to Oslo told me that some of those present had tried to establish for those weapons a special category that they would be able to retain, a category of what they called "intelligent" anti-personnel mines. I do not know what that means. Intelligent or stupid, anti-personnel mines kill, and they often kill the innocent. They must therefore be banned. If while playing in a field your child's leg is torn off by a so-called intelligent mine, you would find no consolation in the thought that the mine was an intelligent one.

In any event, Gabon urges all United Nations Member States to bend all their efforts towards adopting a plan of action for general and complete disarmament. Humanity will be the better for it.

We are not sufficiently aware of the human suffering that underlies armed conflicts, particularly the suffering of the victims, and especially of women, the elderly and children, for killing them means killing the life, the past and the future of the human race. In that connection, one can only employ the word "abominable" in describing the growing use of children in conflicts.

Over the past decade a million children have been killed, 6 million have been seriously wounded or

handicapped for life, more than a million have been orphaned or separated from their families, and millions of others are suffering serious psychological damage. This dark picture is even darker in Africa than in other continents. That is why Gabon, a party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and a signatory of the Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the African Child, joins the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in condemning the use of children as soldiers and urges Governments and all combatants on the battlefield to halt a number of particularly shameful practices, namely, the recruitment of children into the armed forces, the participation of children in combat, and violations and abuses to which they are often subjected.

In another area, the Gabonese authorities are deeply concerned by the struggle against the scourges of crime and drug proliferation, which are other sources of human suffering. We have taken a number of initiatives to combat them, including the reorganization of our security services and the creation of an interministerial commission to combat drug addiction. However, combating those phenomena clearly calls for resolution and determined acts of solidarity and cooperation at the international level.

Turning now to the question of development, I should like to recall that the final goal of government is the well-being of peoples.

Against that background, the international community has evidenced its will to improve the human condition by organizing various workshops, seminars and conferences. I would just mention the Rio Conference on the environment, the Vienna Conference on human rights, the Beijing Conference on women, the Cairo Conference on population, the Copenhagen Conference on social development and the Stockholm Conference on the sexual exploitation of children, as well as the very latest special session of the General Assembly devoted to the mid-term review of Agenda 21.

However, even after all those meetings that aroused such hopes, it looks as though our community is not truly determined to fulfil the obligations it has freely entered into. It seems to be difficult to translate proclaimed intentions into action.

Gabon therefore hopes that there will be greater movement towards action at the forthcoming Kyoto Conference on climate change, which will be a test of the industrialized countries' commitments to sustainable development.

Similarly, we would encourage the International Seabed Authority to continue its work, particularly on the elaboration of a balanced mining code that takes into account the interests of all States as well as environmental questions.

The importance of the eight most developed countries and their real ability to have an impact on the international economy give us ground to hope that the commitments entered into at the recent Denver summit will enable us to work towards strengthening an international economy at the service of humanity.

This may sound like a litany of ills, but until the situation improves we must continue to repeat that Africa is suffering from very serious structural problems. These consist, *inter alia*, of economies, often based on a single crop, that are dependent on the outside world; deterioration in the terms of trade; reverse finance flow; the lowest level of development; the largest number of least developed countries and of displaced persons and refugees.

However, I think it is important to highlight the fact that in addition to its potential, which it owes to raw materials, Africa also represents an effective market of more than 700 million inhabitants.

We know that if it is to develop, our continent must first and foremost rely on itself. Yet there is so much to be done. We are familiar with the slogan, "Trade, not aid". It is not entirely untrue. But would it be outrageous to say that it is not completely true either, because it is obvious that in Africa there exist countries whose development level is already allowing them to cherish some legitimate commercial and trade ambitions on the international market as well as countries that still require assistance, at least in certain areas, and particularly in the social area. To the latter countries, it would be better to say: "Trade *and* aid".

It is in that spirit that Gabon will attend the ninth summit of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States (ACP) associated with the European Union in the context of the Lomé Convention. My country will have the honour of hosting this summit in its capital on 6 and 7 November 1997. I take this opportunity to say to the ACP countries — and all of them are here at the General Assembly — that we are ready to welcome them next month and that we await them all.

Gabon is a beneficiary of the international economic environment, and I would therefore like to share with the Assembly our experience in this area.

Since mid-1995, Gabon's economic performance has improved considerably. The rate of growth has increased significantly; inflation has been reduced to a very low level; and our situation outside the country has been strengthened. Structural measures and administrative reform are accelerating. The Government is stepping up the liberalization of the economy and the cleaning up of the business environment. A vast programme of privatizing public enterprises has already been put into effect. It began with the Gabon Water and Energy Company. The privatization was carried out in very orderly and transparent conditions — to the surprise of not a few — and the programme will be continued in other spheres.

Aware of the decisive role the private sector has to play in Gabon's prosperity and in increasing the standard of living of its people, our Government is trying to establish a legal and regulatory environment which will facilitate private investment and open up various sectors of the economy to competition. We sincerely state that Gabon is open to all private investment. As President Bongo likes to say, "Gabon is not the private reserve of anybody".

The Gabonese authorities are making sure that our commitments in the area of loans and repayments are realistic and viable. They call for appropriate treatment in respect of our foreign public debt, because the strict deadlines for repayment often hamper our efforts to revitalize our economy.

Finally, partnership in all areas must be strengthened and the transfer of technologies encouraged, so that the national capacities of our countries can be revitalized.

In his speech to the General Assembly, the Secretary-General expressed the hope that this session will be known as the Reform Assembly. Indeed, the world today is not what it was in 1945. Our Organization must adapt to the new realities. Gabon therefore welcomes the recommendations of the Secretary-General for the reform of the Organization.

The current discussions must result in consensus machinery that will safeguard the various interests of the Member States. But it remains true that no reform plan can be successful until the financial situation of the United Nations is cured.

My country recalls that we attach great priority to the recommendations formulated by the Organization of African Unity at its last summit, in Harare, and to the proposals made by the Non-Aligned Movement at its Ministerial Conference in New Delhi in April 1997.

President Bongo spoke as long ago as 1977 on the question of an increase in the membership of the Security Council, and I had the occasion to repeat his position before the General Assembly in 1995 and 1996. Let me repeat it one more time. Gabon suggests that we can reconcile the seemingly contradictory requirements in this way: by eliminating the geographical imbalance in the Security Council so as to consolidate its legitimacy and effectiveness; by making the decision-making process in the Council more democratic; and by allowing for a fairer representation of Africa. Africa calls for two permanent seats, with the same rights the other permanent members have; the seats would be rotated in accordance with principles that the African Group will submit in due time to the General Assembly.

Gabon reaffirms here its commitment to the principles of universality and the sovereign equality of States. These should underlie all the thinking in regard to reform.

It is my hope that this session of the General Assembly will enable us to take another step towards strengthening the ideals we all share.

This transition towards a more humane world will not be without perils. We will have to combat simultaneously the upsurge of selfishness and the development of false solidarity, which can lead our peoples to fratricidal struggle.

I am convinced that, united, we will take up the challenge to build a better world.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Tourism and Acting Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Zambia, His Excellency The Honourable Amusaa K. Mwanamwambwa. I now call on him.

Mr. Mwanamwambwa (Zambia): I am pleased to convey the congratulations of the Zambian delegation to His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko on his election as President of the fifty-second session of the United Nations General Assembly. This session is especially important in that it is meant to give impetus to the

ongoing negotiations on the future structure of the United Nations through the reform process. We are confident that with his proven diplomatic skills he will steer the deliberations of this session to a successful conclusion.

For his predecessor, Ambassador Razali Ismail of Malaysia, my delegation has only words of admiration and gratitude for the exemplary work he did during the past session of the General Assembly.

I wish to express my delegation's satisfaction with the skilful manner in which the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has managed the affairs of the Organization since his election last year. Zambia is confident that, given his tested managerial and diplomatic skills, he will effectively manage this Organization as it deals with critical issues confronting the international community today.

At the fiftieth session, world leaders gathered here to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. In celebrating the occasion, we took time to assess the contribution of the United Nations to world peace, economic and social development, and the observance of fundamental human rights, and we reaffirmed our faith in the Organization and agreed to vigorously live up to the objectives of the Charter by strengthening and revitalizing the United Nations system.

It is against this background that my delegation believes that the current session of the General Assembly should seize the opportunity to advance the reform process further. In this regard, it is Zambia's conviction that a comprehensive approach to United Nations reform would, apart from improving efficiency and effectiveness, ensure the implementation of the programmes of action of the global conferences of the 1990s — from Rio to Cairo; Copenhagen to Beijing and Istanbul — which underscored the importance of sustainable development and made it a central theme and a priority. These conferences provided a starting point for a global effort in advancing sustainable development, set goals and defined broad plans of action that provided the basis on which national and international actions could proceed.

While we have agreed on the necessity of reforming our Organization, it is important to ask ourselves what we want to achieve through these reforms. In principle, Zambia welcomes and has carefully studied the Secretary-General's proposals and measures on the negotiations for reform of the United Nations. My delegation expects that the reform process would not only result in a more democratic, efficient, effective and financially stable United Nations, but also have a significant impact on economic and social development. Zambia would like to see the development mandate of the United Nations given priority and prominence in these reforms.

Related to this reform process is the pressing issue of the critical financial situation of the United Nations. It is our view that this state of affairs is the major limiting factor undermining the ability of the United Nations to deal adequately with its mandates in many areas. We would therefore like to see arrears owed to the Organization paid in full, on time and without preconditions.

One of the key components of the reforms of the United Nations is the reform of the Security Council. We demand that the expansion of the Security Council make it more representative and more democratic. This expansion should be at both permanent and non-permanent levels of membership. In this regard, my delegation wishes to state categorically its support for the position adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and the Non-Aligned Movement that the expanded Security Council should have 26 members.

Zambia further supports the demand that the regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean now deserve seats as permanent members on an expanded Security Council. Africa, commanding nearly 30 per cent of the membership of the United Nations, certainly deserves to have two permanent and three non-permanent seats on the Security Council.

My delegation reaffirms its commitment to general and complete disarmament. In this spirit, we would also like to welcome the recent agreement reached in Oslo, Norway, to ban anti-personnel landmines. We hope that all countries of the world will be able to sign the agreement in December this year in Ottawa.

International peace and security also continues to be threatened by conflicts around the globe. Africa, in particular, has witnessed many civil wars whose consequences have been devastating.

Zambia continues to be concerned about the conflicts in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, the Republic of Congo, Sudan and elsewhere on the continent. We would like to appeal to the parties to these conflicts to commit themselves to the principle of negotiated and peaceful settlement of disputes. We call

upon the international community to provide all necessary assistance for resolving these conflicts at an early stage.

In Angola, the civil war has caused some of the worst human suffering. As host to the talks that led to the signing of the Lusaka Protocol, Zambia has a firm desire to ensure that there is lasting peace and security in Angola. However, Zambia is disappointed at the failure of the União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) to comply with its obligations under the Lusaka Protocol and the provisions of relevant Security Council resolutions. Zambia would like to record its displeasure at UNITA's intransigence.

Zambia, together with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and other countries, will continue its efforts to promote conditions leading to the establishment of lasting peace and security in Angola. We believe that peace in Angola will enlarge the parameters of peace in southern Africa, which will enable the countries of the region to concentrate their efforts on social and economic development in an environment of democracy.

Zambia reaffirms the position of the OAU with regard to the situation in Sierra Leone. In this regard, we appeal to the international community to continue to deny recognition to the military junta in Sierra Leone. We demand that the junta hand power back to the democratically elected Government of Sierra Leone.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has just emerged from a seven-month civil war. We are delighted that the country has now begun to turn its attention to the challenges of reconstruction and development. We thus appeal to the international community to unconditionally assist the new administration in that country in facilitating rehabilitation of infrastructure and capacity-building to consolidate the political and economic stability of the country.

We congratulate the people of Liberia on finding peace through the democratic process and also take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) for the commendable role it has played in resolving the Liberian conflict.

Regarding peacekeeping in Africa, we believe that Africa has the primary responsibility for resolving the conflicts on our continent. It is precisely for this reason that the Organization of African Unity established the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution, which we hope the international community will fully support.

On the economic front, Zambia is gratified to note that sub-Saharan Africa has begun to record positive growth rates, which averaged 5 per cent in 1996, the highest level in 20 years. Much of this success is attributable to the social and economic reforms undertaken by many African countries. However, this positive achievement can be sustained only if poverty, deprivation and marginalization are effectively addressed.

Another factor that continues to constrain efforts for sustainable development in many African countries, including my own, is the heavy external debt burden. Zambia welcomes the steps taken by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to implement the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative. We are, however, gravely concerned about the uncertainties surrounding the funding for the Initiative. We also remain concerned about the proliferation of conditions, in particular the use of non-economic factors in determining access to the Initiative.

Zambia believes that the United Nations has a duty to provide leadership in forging international consensus on the crippling external debt problem of developing countries and assisting in the mobilization of new resources for development financing. It is also our expectation that the United Nations will provide leadership in redressing the widening development disparities existing among nations, and addressing the increasing trends towards unfair trading practices and protectionism in international trade, which have had the effect of marginalizing some regions, notably Africa.

Zambia is very concerned about the continued decline in official development assistance at a time when the United Nations is dealing with follow-up to recent international conferences on development. There is also increasing evidence of lack of enthusiasm for honouring agreements freely entered into at international conferences. A case in point is the failure by Governments to implement the agreements, commitments and recommendations made at the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.

The special session of the General Assembly held this past June to review progress in implementation of the Rio agreements found that the rate of implementation of the programme of action has been extremely slow, mainly due to lack of resources. It was also evident that

there was a marked lack of political will to ensure the fulfilment of the agreements of the Rio consensus on environment and development. Zambia would therefore like to see, during this session of the General Assembly, progress on the proposal to convene an international conference on the financing of development. As we all are aware, there has been little progress on this proposal since the forty-sixth session of the General Assembly, when it emerged.

On the domestic front, we in Zambia have adopted national programmes of action in pursuit of the goals and objectives of the Copenhagen World Summit on Social Development, the Cairo Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Declaration. In implementing these programmes of action, my Government has targeted the most vulnerable members of our society to enhance the capacity of their involvement in the country's economic and social life, with a view to raising their standards of living. In this regard, the Government has taken steps to ensure that there is equitable access to quality education by all Zambians by providing universal basic education within the shortest realistic time-frame. A comprehensive programme of health reforms is also under way, and this should also result in the improvement of the health status of our people. The measures and programmes that the Government has undertaken are not, however, sufficient to fully attain the objectives of these programmes of action, mainly due to limited financial resources.

We wish to conclude by underscoring the continuing relevance of the United Nations. The case for reform has been made. We owe it to ourselves and to future generations to ensure that we apply ourselves to the task of reform, knowing well that the world needs a United Nations that can be relied upon to act effectively in ensuring peace and security, and in achieving international cooperation in the economic, social, cultural and humanitarian fields, as envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations.

The Acting President: I call on the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, His Excellency The Honourable Phillip Muller.

Mr. Muller (Marshall Islands): I wish to take this opportunity, on behalf of the Government of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, to congratulate Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko on his election and to commend the President of the fifty-first session of the General Assembly for a job well done.

My delegation has stressed the importance of sustainable development ever since we first became a Member of the United Nations. Our convictions and our support were most recently reiterated by His Excellency The Honourable Imata Kabua, President of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, at the special session of the General Assembly to review Agenda 21. It is, and will remain, the cornerstone of the Government's policy, but I must recall the sentiments that we have often voiced: sustainable development is not the easiest path to travel for a small country like the Marshall Islands. There are numerous obstacles which we must face and which are impeding our progress. Please let me try to put this into better perspective.

Population growth in the Marshall Islands and in many parts of the Pacific is of great concern to our Governments. It has been as high as 4.2 per cent but now appears to be slowing down to 3.5 per cent. This is nevertheless far too high a figure for our small country to sustain. With rather limited resource bases to begin with, it is difficult to imagine what job opportunities will have to be created for new generations. We are already facing problems with layoffs in the public sector. Granted, it was much too large. It was at one point almost 60 per cent of the work force but is now down to 43 per cent. This is still a very high number, and we are looking into all sorts of methods of increasing private sector investment to increase private sector employment.

But population growth also has a negative impact on our local environment. There is a growing trend of migration to the two main urban centres of the Marshall Islands — Majuro, the capital, and Ebeye, close to the United States base at Kwajalein. These areas are becoming increasingly crowded, and there is an urgent need to find local solutions. There is a great need to improve urban conditions, but at the same time we also wish to reduce the rate at which the urban centre population grows.

In a democracy like ours, it is difficult to try to impose any restrictions; instead, we have tried to look into incentives. One idea that has been tried is job creation in the outer islands. We have long been aware of the potential that the outer islands could have if there were only more investment in sustainable development projects.

Population growth is causing difficulties for the country in many diverse fields, but Government and local authority action is making some progress. Our youth and

church groups in particular are taking up this issue as a main concern for the future. But this is only one of many problem which we have to face.

We have by no means given up on the struggle to achieve sustainable development and the improvement of living standards in the Marshall Islands. On the Government side we are first of all looking at how existing structures can be reformed and how better to utilize our resources. We are interested in any innovations that could help us. But it is increasingly clear that if we are to break out of destructive cycles and move away from unsustainable patterns, then we must all work together. There will continue to be a need for external assistance to the Republic of the Marshall Islands, but this can and must be channelled in a more appropriate manner.

Last year we reported that the damage caused by nuclear-weapons testing in the Marshall Islands was far more extensive and devastating than previously understood. We now know that many more islands and groups of people were affected. The testing programme in the Marshall Islands helped the international community understand the effects of nuclear weapons on people and the environment. This knowledge was a contributing factor to the prevention of nuclear war during the cold-war era. In the Marshall Islands, we believe that we played a significant role in bringing about the end of the cold war. We share the commitment of the United Nations to world peace, security and disarmament.

There is little question that the nuclear-testing programme in the Marshall Islands was the defining experience of the Marshallese people in this century. The 67 nuclear-weapon tests conducted in our country and the tests conducted on our neighbouring Pacific islands contaminated every inch of our environment and exposed each one of our citizens to radiation. As a result, my Government is desperately seeking resources to address the direct medical and environmental consequences of radiation exposure, since we do not have sufficient funds. We are also struggling to deal with the indirect problems of the displacement of, and the lack of adequate medical care for, the affected population. It places an additional burden on our already constrained medical care resources.

We cannot solve these problems on our own, and we feel obliged to appeal to the international community. We certainly appreciate all efforts to address our problems made by our former administering authority, and we are encouraged by recent indications that the United States is willing to address outstanding concerns. Yet present efforts to address lingering consequences are inadequate. Marshallese people have the basic human right, like all people throughout the world, to a healthy and clean environment. We are justified, therefore, in asking assistance in restoring our lands and returning our displaced populations to a safe environment.

In this regard the United Nations has an important role to play. We are encouraged that the International Atomic Energy Agency is in the process of conducting a survey in the northern areas of the Marshall Islands. But another body, the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation, could in our view have a much greater role. We have noted the terms of reference of that Scientific Committee, and we see no reason why it cannot undertake studies that could in the future assist those populations that are suffering from the effects of atomic radiation. In our view it must go beyond a simple academic understanding and have a role that would allow more interaction with affected countries. I was also a little puzzled by the brevity of the Scientific Committee's last report — only one page. We would like to request that the Committee expand its scope of work, to see how it could look into areas, like the Marshall Islands, affected by nuclear tests. We would be willing to assist the Scientific Committee in obtaining, for its consideration, documents and declassified information pertaining to nuclear testing and its effects on people. My delegation intends to review this issue in the Fourth Committee.

My country, all low-lying atolls, with no mountains, is also facing a most serious threat of sea level rise. While we are here discussing this issue, the effects of erosion, storms and tide surges are already being felt in the Marshall Islands. We are of the firm opinion that the scientists working with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) have by now made such a convincing argument about this troubling issue. This consensus has been reflected in the acceptance by all Governments concerned of the Second Assessment Report of the IPCC. As a result of this acceptance of the scientific proof, we would have expected, at the very least, that the developed countries would agree to undertake so-called no-regrets measures. Such measures seek to improve efficiency and reduce waste, and to develop alternative sources of energy. My Government fully supports such initiatives, as they seem to us to be a perfectly sensible way to begin addressing climate change. But we are finding that there is resistance even to such a modest idea aimed at trying to halt this irresponsible waste of natural resources and fossil fuels.

I have been hearing reports that in the negotiating process there are still those countries that seek to undermine the process itself for their own short-term gains. I can only say that my Government is saddened by these countries' attitude. For this reason, a Pacific regional expert group has warned that we may have to look at our migration options, rather than adaptation options. Are we willing to see the disappearance of whole countries for the sake of short-term economic gain?

A recent newspaper ad campaign here in the United States has further attempted to add confusion and doubt in regard to the scientific evidence, and is also spreading alarmist doomsday scenarios for the economies of the developed countries. This is simply a misrepresentation of what is being discussed and of what has been proposed, as well as what is likely to be the result if we do not act now. I was further amazed at seeing television ads stating similar misleading information. The question that appears to be raised is that the developed countries will pay a heavy financial price for ineffective measures. The suggestion here is that climate change is a preposterous plot by developing countries to dominate the industrialized economies. But climate change would be costly to us all. The destruction of small island developing States and other low-lying areas will only be the first marker as the flood gates open for full-blown climate change. There should be no misconception that there is any other option except action to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I wish to state our position, supported by scientists, economists and concerned people, that inaction will result in a disaster for mankind. What we need as the first step are significant, legally binding cuts in the greenhouse gas emissions of the industrialized world.

Please allow me to state our gratitude to and full support for the Secretary-General in his efforts and proposals to reform the United Nations. His report has been studied by our officials, and we have concluded that we must give the Secretary-General our full backing on his vision for a reformed United Nations. I have some experience with the difficulties of bringing reform to an unwilling system, and we understand fully what he is going through. But reform is crucial if we are to have a forward-looking and effective United Nations, a United Nations that can assist us developing countries in our search for sustainable development. All the national efforts of countries like the Marshall Islands require an international support structure that is conducive to sustainable development goals. The United Nations has a crucial and vital role, and we must maintain its leadership and coordination function.

Reform of the United Nations requires that the Member States recommit themselves to their treaty obligations to negotiate in good faith and find the mutually beneficial steps that we need to take. I wish to reiterate the support which my Government has given to the proposals that have come out of the Committee on Contributions as a good starting point for financial reform. Let us take these modest first steps, and then in the next phase we can finish the reform.

Reform will also have to involve the expansion of the Security Council. We have stated our support for various proposals in past general debates, and we have been involved in the working groups. Last week the Prime Minister of Fiji reiterated their proposal to give more prominence to the Pacific as a subregion of the Asian Group. This is an idea that we wholeheartedly embrace. It has captured a very important facet of the reasons why we need to have expansion — that is, to facilitate the participation of all countries in the Security Council. Our countries would feel much more comfortable with the decisions of the Security Council if we had a better opportunity to be a member. There is also a need to review the use and extent of the veto power, and whether there should in fact be any new permanent members of the Security Council. It may well be that a more equitable rotation structure would suffice.

These are some of the most pressing issues before this session of the General Assembly. The connection between what occurs in the international community and the impact the results have on individual countries should be made clearer. The sustainable development process that we wish to work towards requires a great effort on the part of the Marshall Islands Government and citizenry.

Similarly, the international community as a whole must be involved in charting a more democratic and cooperative future in this singular world organization. We feel that we deserve the support of the international community for our own efforts, and we pledge to work constructively with the United Nations system and donor community.

The Acting President: The next speaker is the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Liberia, His Excellency Mr. Monie Captan, to whom I give the floor.

Mr. Captan (Liberia): I have the honour to present my personal compliments to His Excellency

Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko and to wish him every success during his presidency.

I have the honour also to deliver the address of His Excellency Mr. Charles Ghankay Taylor, President of the Republic of Liberia, who regrettably cannot be here today. The text of his address reads as follows:

"At the outset, I wish to convey sincere greetings, on behalf of the Government and people of Liberia and in my own name. We are here today, having endured and survived a severe civil crisis of nearly a decade, through the acute consciousness of our subregion, whose empathy with Liberia's plight created and orchestrated a mechanism to prevent us from self-destruction. And we stand no less indebted to a sea of humanitarian outreach through the international community, most notably the European Union (EU) and the United States; but absolutely, as a living testimony to God Almighty, whose compassionate will has removed the hand of evil from the activities of our nation.

"Indeed, we are here because Liberia has stood the test of time and the full assault of hardship. Today, one added voice of a sovereign State of Africa — and an original Charter Member of this Organization — is being heard through its constituted Head of Government, which we symbolize, and for which we give all glory to God.

"It is my pleasure to congratulate His Excellency Mr. Hennadiy Udovenko on his election to the presidency of this fifty-second session of the General Assembly. To this we add our best wishes for his success in meeting the challenges of this awesome assignment. Also, it is befitting that we extend our thanks to his predecessor, His Excellency Mr. Razali Ismail, whose tenure was characterized by a resolute commitment to finding solutions to the many issues which impacted the proceedings of the fifty-first session.

"I wish also to seize this opportunity to commend, on behalf of the Government and people of Liberia, Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Already, he has demonstrated that he understands the problems which afflict Africa, his native continent, and that his leadership is not confined to the accomplishments which he earned as a son of Ghana. Day by day, glimpses of his ability as an effective spokesman for all mankind are being made clearly visible. Permit me to also pay special honour to the former Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, whose sense of purpose and invaluable efforts to strengthen the role of the Organization in the pursuit of international peace and security have brought benefits to mankind. We stand convinced that the patience he exercised and the many initiatives and the personal commitment he injected into the search for peace and understanding during his tenure deserve appropriate commendation by this Organization.

"The establishment of the United Nations over five decades ago marked the beginning of a new era in international relations. The adoption of its Charter, a document of pride and durability, which Liberia helped to formulate, instituted a working system of international cooperation. Thus, nations are resolved to eradicate the scourge of war; to strengthen peace through justice and international law; to respect the equal rights of all nations — large and small; to promote social progress and to protect human rights throughout the world. We wish to reaffirm our avowed faith in the United Nations, and we retain the undiminished hope that this Organization will continue to be a veritable instrument for the good conduct of relations among all nation States. In so asserting our firm commitment to its ideals, we, therefore, rededicate ourselves to its objectives. Indeed, from nearly every perspective, this Organization continues to cater to the common aspirations of the international community. Today, with its increased image as a centre for harmonization, the vision of its Charter Members has expanded across its original spectrum of engagement.

"Accordingly, as one of its visionaries who actively participated in its creation, we felt it propitious that — despite our recent civil conflict and its heart-rending accounts — we be personally represented at this fifty-second session, not only to reaffirm our commitment to multilateralism, but also to explore new ways of transforming our hopes for solidarity into concrete actions for peace and development; not only to make a ceremonial representation, but also to add frankness to the scope of discussions for the improvement of our Organization.

"On 19 July, the eve of the sesquicentennial anniversary of our independence, the people of

Liberia went to the polls and made a forthright decision for a great new beginning for democracy, for representative government within a constitutional order, and for peace and prosperity in the forward march towards the twenty-first century. In that momentous exercise, the Liberian people demonstrated once again, as they had done throughout 150 years of survival, their resilience and unconquerable will to overcome imponderable odds, to keep alive the flame of national independence in Africa.

"Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, at the birth of his nation defined independence as the moment 'when an age ends, and the soul of the nation, long suppressed, finds utterance'.

"Thus, when the tragic events of our national experience in the recent past are viewed within the context of historical inevitability, we can safely say that the elections of 19 July 1997 gave rise to a newly liberated soul of the Liberian nation.

"It is in this light that we see the landslide victory of 19 July 1997 as the final coming together of all of our people in a national embrace of unity to give vibrancy to the liberated national soul. The vote took place during the week of the solemn celebration of the 150-year anniversary of the founding of the nation. It was a vote rooted in renewed hope, which concurs with what one writer refers to as 'idealism suffused with a sense of ending'. The people voted to end civil war and national turbulence and to begin a new era of peace, stability, democracy, responsible government and prosperity.

"We have fully grasped the message of our people's verdict. Upon our inauguration on 2 August 1997, we set out to form a Government of inclusion. We have also embarked on a process of national reconciliation. We have invited all Liberians, irrespective of political party affiliation, religious orientation and ethnic origin, to come and join hands with us in rebuilding our country. We have assured all that our primary objective is to foster national unity as the best hope for genuine peace and progress in our country.

"We have also reaffirmed the 1986 Constitution as the Organic Law of Liberia. That Constitution guarantees and protects the fundamental rights and freedoms of all alike. We are committed to making that sacred document work. Our Administration will guarantee and promote the functioning of a credible and independent judiciary. We shall also protect human rights and freedom of the press. Above all, we shall endeavour to promote internal stability through a Government of inclusion and national unity.

"Our experience as a nation convinces us that the right to self-determination is a necessary prerequisite for any people to ensure national development and to play a meaningful role in the community of nations. The right to self-determination is not, in our view, limited to liberation from external control, but also applies to liberation from internal tyranny. It is being demonstrated time and again that it is unhealthy for external support to be tied to the survival of a particular regime rather than to the growth and development of the nation. There is no substitute for legitimacy and good governance. Internal liberation awakens a new consciousness about peace, security, stability and conflict resolution within a society. The institutions of the market economy are strengthened, and the people develop greater hope for a decent and better standard of living.

"In this connection, and based on our experience, Liberia will continue to play the role of promoting regional peace and security, fostering national development through regional and subregional integration and promoting democratic values through institution-building.

"We are aware of the significant changes which are taking place, including the increased tendency towards political pluralism and democratization, the rise in economic growth in a number of countries and the upsurge towards market economies, as well as progress towards the liberalization and globalization of the world economy.

"The end of the cold war has resulted in a relaxation of tension, particularly between world Powers, and improved interactions among and between States. My Government must nevertheless register its grave concern that since the advent of the historic fiftieth anniversary of this Organization, some regional conflicts which appeared on the verge of resolution have defied settlement. We are deeply disturbed by ongoing conflicts in Africa, the Middle

East, Europe and Asia. Historical evidence has shown that conflicts, whether in Africa or elsewhere, will have negative consequences, not only for the countries directly affected, but also for their neighbours and the regions of which they are a part. Liberians know only too well the consequences of a protracted conflict and therefore urge all parties to the various conflicts to seek a negotiated settlement of their differences.

"In recent times, several unfavourable developments have continued to threaten international peace and security. At present, in the Middle East, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is permeated with accusations, charges and counter-charges, despite the signing of the Agreement of 28 September 1995. In spite of the fact that efforts to pacify the situation are being undermined, we urge States within the region which are taking concrete steps, as well as the international community, to give more attention to ensuring that the peace process remains on course.

"Within our subregion, while we draw immense satisfaction from the fact that the Liberian crisis has finally ended and the Liberian people have achieved durable peace and stability, we lament the reality of the threatening situation which recently has developed in neighbouring Sierra Leone. This matter truly leaves much to be desired, and we cannot overemphasize the fact that it is in the best interests of Liberia and its neighbours that peace be soon established in Sierra Leone and its people reconciled.

"Liberia, a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Committee of Five on Sierra Leone, is committed to a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the Sierra Leonean crisis. We are of the firm conviction that it is our responsibility to ensure security and stability within our subregion.

"Notwithstanding the individual and collective efforts of African States to achieve socio-political transformation, acts of destabilization continue to pose a serious threat to these countries. That is why African countries have intensified cooperation at the regional and subregional levels to stem this trend. We welcome the growing cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations in the fulfilment of Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, and the renewed commitment to conflict resolution through preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping and peace-building.

"In the economic sphere, recent conscientious efforts have resulted in the registration of positive signs in the revitalization of the global economy. This progressive trend has been taking place against the backdrop of explosive growth in world trade and private investment flows. In the meantime, developing countries have thus far contributed 70 per cent of the growth in global gross domestic product and half of the growth in world trade. Notwithstanding this, the gap between developed and developing countries continues to grow, leaving many countries behind amidst the general positive economic progress occurring in the world. More importantly, official development assistance required to fill the gap in resource depletion has fallen to its lowest point in real terms during the past 23 years, thereby forcing many of the world's poorest countries deeply into debt, and making it virtually impossible for them to undertake or sustain economic reforms.

"This situation has affected most developing countries, particularly those in Africa which continue to experience the crippling impact of external debt, deteriorating terms of trade and decline in investment and financial flows. While we acknowledge that the development of the African continent is primarily the responsibility of its people, we hope that Africa's development will, of necessity, remain an area of concern to the international community. We commend the Secretary-General for his continuing initiatives for the development of Africa. The Government of Japan also deserves Africa's appreciation for helping to sensitize the international community to the need to assist African countries to overcome the negative trends which are impacting on their economies.

"Closely related to the issues of development is that of the environment. The human impact on the environment has increased dramatically, with unprecedented effects on mankind. Nevertheless, we remain hopeful that the growing awareness of the degradation of the environment and the need to reverse this trend will remain a priority on the global agenda. In this connection, my Government commends the holding of the recent high-level meeting convened by the United Nations to review progress on the implementation of decisions reached on Agenda 21 since the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development.

"The Government of Liberia is concerned about the alarming incidence of drug trafficking and drug abuse, which have already destroyed and continue to ruin countless lives. While this unfortunate development has undermined the integrity of many Governments, we commend cooperative efforts between Governments that have taken bold action to prevent and eradicate drug trafficking and drug abuse. We welcome the Secretary-General's proposal to merge the Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme.

"The Liberian Government is prepared to work very closely with the international community in order to bring success to the international campaign that strives to undermine the production of and trafficking in illicit drugs. We are assured in this connection that, working in the framework of international cooperation and given our commitment, we are bound to succeed in our efforts to make our world a safer place for ourselves and our children.

"Regarding the restructuring of the Security Council, we must recall that with the founding of this Organization we committed ourselves and succeeding generations to continuously preserve peace and security in our world. Let us remember that peace will be elusive in the world where social, economic and political rights are flouted. In this connection, and in view of the Security Council's primary role in the maintenance of international peace and security, its reform is of particular urgency. We note the emergence during the fifty-first session of the growing consensus to restructure the Council so as to ensure that it becomes more representative and democratic. This would encourage the advent of a greater balance between the requirement of efficiency and that of expansion, as well as transparency in its method of work. Moreover, with optimum utilization of the resources of those Member States that can contribute significantly to peacekeeping operations, immense successes will redound to the credit of this Organization.

"Due to the far-reaching implications for global peace of the Security Council's decisions and actions, there have been persistent demands to expand its membership to reflect geographic balance and ensure equitable representation. Besides, of the fifteen members of the Council, five enjoy the veto power. The right of veto, we believe, is against the principle of universality and leaves the fate of our world to be decided by only a few Members of the United Nations.

"Accordingly, Liberia joins the call for expanded membership of the Security Council. We also request that, as the region with the single largest number of Members, Africa be given two permanent seats on the Council. We further call for the elimination of the veto power.

"Liberia believes that no country or institution can prosper if it is resistant to change — the United Nations being no exception. In this connection, we agree with the Secretary-General's decision to institute reforms in the administrative and operational aspects of the Organization. Notwithstanding this, we support a reform process that does not diminish the capacity of the United Nations to perform the Charter-mandated functions in the area of development, more especially to meet the needs of developing countries. We are, therefore, heartened by the Secretary-General's indication that savings accrued from the exercise will be utilized to establish an economic- and social-development account for the sole purpose of financing development programmes launched by the United Nations. We note that $200 million will be saved for development by the year 2002.

"The issue of sanctions has occupied much time and energy here over the years, and Liberia, like other African nations and nations around the world, has watched sanctions succeed, and fail, as a means of encouraging change. Sanctions' greatest triumph was perhaps in South Africa, where international sanctions isolated the racist apartheid regime and contributed to its eventual downfall.

"But unfortunately, as we know, sanctions are not always so successful. Time and again, nations singled out for punitive sanctions have been able to circumvent the edicts of this world body and obtain the goods or the weapons they seek. Still worse, the leaders of these nations, who are the real targets of the political and economic pressure that sanctions are meant to deliver, often feel no pain. Sadly, it is the innocent people — already the victims of these regimes — who suffer the most. On balance, then, our Government is sceptical about sanctions as a tool for change. Unless they are universally adopted, strictly enforced and carefully designed to

achieve specific political goals, we believe that sanctions can too easily end up harming those they are designed to help.

"The Liberian civil war was to a great extent, a protest against the blatant disregard for and violation of the rights of Liberians. At the end of seven years of civil war, the need to consolidate peace is of the highest priority to my Government. It is essential to national survival and the sustenance of our newly created democracy that the post-war reconciliation policy be firmly grounded in developing a culture and tradition consistent with international norms of respect for basic human rights.

"In furtherance of this objective, my Government has initiated a process to create by law a National Commission on Human Rights that will operate independently and that will investigate, document and report cases of human rights violations. Additionally, the post of Deputy Minister for Human Rights has been created within the Ministry of Justice, with specific responsibility to ensure the protection of basic human rights.

"Since its inauguration on 2 August, our Government has taken prompt and appropriate steps that will protect the rights of all people, whether citizens or aliens, residing in the country. As a testimony to this commitment, some immigration officers were dismissed when they were found guilty of having brutalized some alleged aliens. Additionally, a private lawyer successfully filed a writ of habeas corpus against the Minister of Justice, the Commissioner of Immigration and the Director of Police for detaining a number of aliens for over forty-eight hours without the formal charge required. The lawyer won the case and the aliens were released.

"Without a doubt, we as a Government are aware that we are being keenly observed, as if through a microscope, both internally and externally. Accordingly, we do not intend to water down our promise that matters relating to human rights will be kept clean and our record maintained unadulterated. As a candidate for the presidency, we made it abundantly clear that, when elected, there would be no witch-hunting. On this account, we stand to be challenged.

"We are witnesses to the rapid growth of the global village through advances in technology, communications and tolerance, which, too, have encouraged world peace and stability. Indeed, when the illustrious architects of this noble Organization conceived the idea, from the Dumbarton Oaks Conference to the Yalta Conference, before drawing up the United Nations, the world was not as it is today. From its original membership of 51 nations in 1945, the United Nations now has an impressive membership of 185 nations. Out of this number, 28 have been admitted just since 1990, the latest being Palau, in 1994.

"The parallel existence of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China on either side of the Taiwan Strait constitutes for my country, a founding Member of the Organization, one of the difficulties and the source of the prevalent sense of frustration that continue to persist on the international political scene since the end of the cold war.

"It really begs the issue to review the decision of the General Assembly on 25 October 1971, when its Members voted to admit the People's Republic of China to membership while ignoring a compromise proposal that the Republic of China retain a seat in the General Assembly. My country, a life-long supporter of the principle of including every nation in the United Nations system, feels that there should be a re-examination of the proposal to which I have just referred, with a view to admitting the Republic of China to the General Assembly. Quite clearly, existing global realities make it necessary and prudent for us to review the action taken in 1971. We believe that the United Nations is the proper instrument for the correction of many seemingly intractable problems. We would add that this Organization is the most significant international forum for the resolution of complex crises and that all nations that desire to participate in the United Nations should have that right. Yet, in the highest sense, we believe that until reunification is achieved the parallel participation in the United Nations of the People's Republic of China and the Republic of China would be conducive to regional security and world peace.

"One of the principal challenges facing Liberia today is the revitalization of its economy. The past prosperity of the Liberian economy was built on the successful development of the country's abundant natural resources and the active participation of the

private sector. We also enjoyed the benefits of a lively transit trade with our neighbours. During the years of economic mismanagement and civil strife, the economy collapsed and the livelihood of ordinary people was impaired.

"Bringing prosperity back to the country is an enormous challenge. We are determined that the benefits of such prosperity should reach all the people of Liberia, and not merely the privileged few. I am convinced that the private sector has a key role to play. The management of the economy must be transparent and cost effective. The burden of external debt, which we inherited, needs to be addressed. A positive relationship with the international financial institutions is central to the success of our reconstruction programme. We need an early infusion of financial resources on favourable terms to launch the post-war reconstruction programmes.

"Private-sector operations in rubber, timber and mining will provide jobs and earn foreign exchange for the country. We need to create a favourable climate for new investment. This means that the fiscal regime must be reformed and simplified and that taxes be paid to the Government. My Government has already implemented a programme to centralize all revenue collection under the Ministry of Finance. Our exchange rate and currency practices are being reviewed in order to guide local and foreign investors and inform them about the transaction costs of doing business.

"In managing the economy we must make the best use of scarce resources. There is no place in the new Liberia for ineffective public corporations and a bloated civil service that are a drain on the budget. Revenue collection is being tightened up, expenditure strictly controlled, and the budget used as the main vehicle for prudent fiscal management and public accountability. Given our very limited resources, this will mean that many priority projects will have to wait.

"Liberia's external debt to international financial institutions and other external creditors, inherited from previous Governments, imposes a huge burden on my Government. We believe that the size of that burden, coupled with the cost of rebuilding a shattered society, makes it essential that the international community make special concessions.

"My Government intends to manage public finances in accordance with the high standards expected of any good government. But we cannot consolidate the transition from war to peace unless immediate funds are available to run the machinery of government and to start up the reintegration programmes designed by donors, in consultation with our Government.

"I stand here in this great Hall and before honoured representatives of independence as the representative of a nation that only 75 days ago underwent a free, fair and peaceful election — perhaps one of the most transparent elections ever held anywhere in the world. I hail from a national heritage which, more than a century and half ago, was born out of enslavement, servitude and racism and which progressed from thence to freedom and independence, and my proud homeland, in its struggle to maintain its sovereignty and independence, lost almost half of its territory to external Powers. Indeed, I speak of a land of liberty that has passed through more than its share of political crucibles.

"We have come, but not in anger. Rather, we have emerged from a stained past of self-inflicted suffering, which is perhaps not the sures: rationale for qualifying. But our scars enable us to speak, with some constraint, at nearly first hand about how we have been able to survive and keep our dignity as a sovereign State and people. We ask that the Assembly accord us the requisite attention, while retaining the hope that the experience of conflict resolution in Liberia and the engagement of the United Nations and the international community, in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) through its peacekeeping instrument, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which helped restore peace and harmony to Liberia, will enlighten members on future undertakings in the arena of civil conflict.

"In all candour, if there is anything of substance that must be said, it is this: Let us never again allow any form of human anguish to be left in isolation, no matter how meaningless it may appear in the eyes of controlling Powers. Should it not be understood that one human tear is just as painful as another and that the entire globe is united by the same life-generating substance?

"We have come to the United Nations to advocate international cooperation. Let us not close our eyes to the countless failures in the achievement of our common objectives as we enter the twenty-first century. Let us take note of the dangers and work together so that reason can prevail. The economic problems and social dangers the world faces are immense, and we have no right to postpone solutions or open the door to conflict and instability. Strategic confrontation dominated the best minds of this century. Perhaps it is now time to turn our eyes upon ourselves, upon our peoples and our societies, to assess their condition, their moral needs and their crises, and to attempt to find solutions.

"To conclude, I wish to make an appeal to the heart, without distinction as to creed, dogma, political colour or national faction. I should like each of us to look the other in the eye and ask ourselves sincerely and frankly: Is this the world our children deserve? Will we be satisfied when, in the near future, the voice of history and of our blood summons us to judgement? The United Nations system and the entire international community will be judged on the basis of their response to those important questions."

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.